THE VIRTUES AWAKENED

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From the Treatise on Perfect Happiness

BY

THE VENERABLE LEONARD LESSIUS, S.J.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL LATIN

BY

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TO MY FRIEND
THE RIGHT REVEREND
JOHN JOSEPH O'CONNOR, D.D.,
BISHOP OF NEWARK

PREFACE

As the ancient philosophers were ignorant of what constitutes true happiness, they were ignorant also of the way that leads to it; and there is no wonder in this, since both that end and the means to gain it are altogether supernatural, and thence cannot be discovered by natural reason. This is why it is impossible to obtain eternal happiness by the powers of nature, and why we need the special help from God, which we call grace. Thus God's grace is a general aid, *without* which we cannot contribute anything conducive to our eternal beatitude, but *with* which we can easily attain it.

Hence, on the part of God, grace is most necessary both for knowing Him and for doing those things which He requires from us, while on our part, there is required unremitting coöperation through the observance of His commandments.

But the chief means for obtaining God's grace is prayer; and for our unremitting coöperation with grace nothing is more important than the consideration of certain fundamental truths, by which we are wondrously urged on to the love and practice of the several Christian virtues. For all the good of man, and all the perfection of his life, come

from the consideration of the divine perfections and of other things which awaken love for the virtues and hatred for the vices. Just as, on the contrary, all the imperfection in man's life and all evil are begotten by the neglect of this consideration. For if we applied ourselves to considering those things with the attention and earnestness which they deserve, we should never commit any grievous sin, but, on the contrary, our soul would be constantly overflowing with most noble virtues.

This is why it has seemed good for me here to treat of those two aids, namely, prayer and the awakening of the virtues, especially after a counsel of an eminent man who has expressed a desire that I should write something on these subjects.

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THE VIRTUES AWAKENED

CHAPTER I

Prayer and the Best Method of Prayer

Prayer in general is divided into praise, thanksgiving, and petition. For prayer is that eminent act of the virtue of religion by which we honor God, either by praising Him, or by thanking Him for benefits received from Him, or by begging new benefits from Him as the source of all good things. *Obsecration,* or beseeching through sacred things, like the divine mercy, Christ, Christ's merits, etc., is mere petition, and does not constitute a distinct species of prayer, but only alleges special reasons for granting favors.

How salutary prayer is, if made in the right way, is manifest from three causes.

In the first place, prayer is eminently meritorious, since it comprises the concurrence of acts of most noble virtues, like faith, hope, charity, religion, humility, gratitude, etc. In praise there is a concurrence of faith, charity, and religion. In thanksgiv-

ing, of faith, charity, and gratitude. In petition, of faith, hope, religion, and humility. Thus, after the reception of the sacraments, there is nothing in this life, which is more salutary or excellent than the diligent practice of prayer.

In the second place, because prayer is a general means of easily obtaining from God all that is conducive to our salvation. As St. John Chrysostom says in his first book on prayer, it is a key with which we can unlock all God's treasuries, and take from them what seems to us best for obtaining our eternal salvation. The Holy Scriptures inculcate this teaching in many places, in order that we may diligently consider it and know it to be most true. In Matthew vii, 7, and in Luke xi, 9, Our Lord says: "And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh, receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Here He repeats the same thing six times in different words, in order to make us most certain, and He afterwards confirms it by the two touching examples of a friend asking a loaf of bread from a friend late at night, and of a son asking bread, or a fish or an egg, from his father. Then He draws the conclusion: "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts (which you have, not from yourselves, but from God) to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven,

give good things to them that ask Him." Likewise He says in John xiv, 13: "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." And He immediately repeats almost the same thing: "If you shall ask anything in my name, that will I do." And He says in Mark xi, 24: "All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you."

By these teachings so often repeated, Our Lord wishes to make us certain that we shall receive all the things that are good for our eternal salvation, if we come to Him by prayer, reverencing His Infinite Majesty.

In the third place, prayer is a means which ordinarily is necessary for our salvation. Very many of the helps useful for our salvation, are obtainable through prayer; for instance, the means which ordinarily are necessary for overcoming temptations and persevering unto the end. God, out of His ineffable benignity ofttimes gives many aids to those who do not pray. However, He has not promised, and ordinarily does not give, to those who do not pray, those more powerful aids and that special protection and direction by which men persevere unto the end and obtain eternal salvation. Hence the Holy Scriptures admonish us to pray always, so far as our human weakness allows. Ecclesiasticus xviii, 22 says: "Let nothing hinder thee

from praying always." This is as much as to say: "Do not accept any business or any office which hinders thee from praying always, as far as human frailty permits." Our Lord says in Mark xiii, 33: "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is." And in Luke xviii, 1, He shows by a parable that "we ought always to pray and not to faint." And in xxi, 36 He says: "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things [all dangers to salvation] that are to come, and to stand before the Son of man." And in I Thess. v, 17, we read: "Pray without ceasing."

The reason why Almighty God exacts prayer as a condition for bestowing His favors, is that He wishes us to recognize Him and His benefits, and to confess that without His grace and aid we cannot escape the dangers to our salvation, or overcome temptations, or obtain salvation. Hence He wishes us assiduously to have recourse to Himself through prayer, and in this way to obtain all the things which will save our soul.

He who habitually prays as he ought, therefore, must feel certain that none of the things which are good for his salvation will be withheld from him by God; and hence he must be assured that he will be saved, if on his own part he is not unfaithful to divine grace through sloth and gross neglect.

In order to pray in the right and proper way,

we must observe certain things *before* and *during* prayer.

Before prayer we must make a certain preparation. The Wise Man says in Ecclesiasticus xviii, 23: "Before prayer prepare thy soul and be not like unto a man that tempteth God." He is deemed to tempt God who strives to obtain in a way which is inept for obtaining, and which deserves to receive a punishment rather than a favor.

This preparation requires *three things.*

The first is that we place God, with whom we are to treat, before our eyes, and present ourselves in His sight. This can be done in various ways.

The first way is to represent God to ourselves as a *Spirit diffused through all creation,* filling all, and containing all, and most clearly seeing and hearing us. Indeed He is present everywhere, and, as Ecclesiasticus says (xxiii, 28): "His eyes are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts." In all our prayer we must treat with Him thus placed and considered before our eyes, as with one present and seeing and hearing us.

A second way is to represent God to ourselves as an immense *light* intimately present in us, and dwelling in our hearts, with all His treasures and gifts, with all His power, wisdom, sanctity and goodness, with which He can make us holy and blessed in a

moment. In this way we may address all our prayer to Him as abiding within us, and as hidden in the bottom of our soul.

A third way is to conceive Him as under an august human form, *seated on His heavenly throne,* surrounded by infinite light and countless myriads of Angels, after the manner in which He appeared to Daniel, and to John in the Apocalypse, and to Isaias, and to others.

A fourth way is to place before our eyes *Our Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity,* as hanging on the cross on Mount Calvary, or as sitting at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, surrounded by a countless host of Angels and blessed spirits, or as seated on the clouds of Heaven as the Judge of the living and the dead.

It is in these or similar ways that we should conceive God when we wish to pray seriously, and that we should most humbly bow down in spirit before Him, so that all our prayers may be addressed to him as present, seeing and hearing us. For he who wishes to converse with a person needs to have him present and to treat with him as present; else he does not address his words to a person, but talks in the air. Hence this consideration of the divine presence is most necessary in prayer, and we should try to procure it with the greatest diligence.

In the second place, preparation for prayer re-

quires that we think of the *matter* about which we are to converse with God. He who is on the point of speaking to a great personage, previously considers what he is to say. Much more should he who is to address God, previously consider what subject he is to treat; for instance, whether he wishes to praise God, or to thank Him, or to ask favors from Him, and if so, what favors.

In the third place, our preparation for prayer requires that we *ask Almighty God for His help* so that we may be able to do such a great thing properly, with the elevation and attention of soul and with the reverence and love which are proper in a creature conversing with its Creator. Hence we should select the most suitable time, when our mind is most serene and open for contemplation, and shut out all other thoughts and cares, just as if we had no interest in human affairs and we were alone in the world with God and His Angels.

After this preparation we should begin our prayer, which, to be made in the best way, demands three things.

The first is great *attention to God,* whom we are addressing and whom we have placed before our eyes in our preparation. For all our prayer is to be addressed to Him as present. This attention will cause us to make our prayer with great reverence.

In the second place, our prayer demands careful

attention to the meaning of the words which we pronounce, especially when we recite psalms or other vocal prayers. Hence we should previously try to acquire a thorough understanding of those words. Those who recite the canonical hours, satisfy the precept of the Church and perform a pious and meritorious work if they are at least attentive to God, to whom they speak, and reverently pronounce the prescribed words, even though they do not understand them; but their prayer would be far more excellent if they understood the words they pronounce and uttered them with the spirit with which they were first conceived and written and chanted to God by the Prophet.

The third requirement is that we strive to *awaken* and foster in ourselves those *affections* which the words call for in their various parts, and which their sacred authors and other holy and enlightened men felt while chanting them. To gain this end, it is well not to read or recite too many words nor to proceed with undue haste. It is impossible for the soul to find great relish in a prayer which is said hurriedly. It is necessary to give some time to consideration in order to awaken the affections, especially if they are to vary according to the varying matters. This last remark is not to be understood as entirely applicable to prayers which are long and therefore require much time. The mind would be fatigued by too prolonged an effort. But

with short prayers like the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed, a psalm or two, some hymns, etc., this method should be given a trial. Although it may involve some difficulty in the beginning, practice will gradually make it easy and pleasant. The single verses and words should be considered with attention, and the force of each weighed, by considering causes, effects, circumstances, etc. It is good to repeat each verse three or four times, and to masticate it—as it were—before taking up the next.

In order that these general directions may be better appreciated, I will exemplify them by applying them to the words of the *Our Father.*

Our Father. Truly Thou art our Father; for, prompted by Thy benign goodness, Thou hast made us out of nothing to Thine own image and likeness. After our fall into sin, Thou hast redeemed us from eternal death. Thou hast adopted us as Thy sons; Thou hast sanctified us by Thy Holy Spirit; Thou hast called us to be heirs of Heaven; and by Thy fatherly providence Thou dost direct us to Heaven. Thou art our Father, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, our Guide, and the generous Giver of all good things. With relation to us, the name of Father is appropriate to God as comprising the entire Trinity, for all the acts of Fatherhood towards us are common to all three Divine Persons.

Who art in Heaven. In Heaven Thou unveilest Thyself; there Thou showest Thyself, there Thou

art known and loved, blessed and praised, for ever and ever. In the minds of blessed spirits, which are more capacious than all the corporeal heavens, Thy Majesty shines forth, there Thou dost reign and triumph eternally.

Hallowed be Thy name! Hallowed be thy name (all that Thou art and all that Thou art called). Hallowed be Thy name among men in this most remote part of Thy Kingdom. May all mortals know Thee, fear Thee, love Thee, praise Thee, and bless Thee, for ever and ever. This is hallowing Thy name. May it live, flourish, and grow to the end of the world.

Thy Kingdom come! May the reign of impiety, the rule of sin and Satan, be abolished! May Thy Kingdom come and rule over all! In the first place, may there come Thy reign of faith, of hope and of charity, and through these virtues mayest Thou reign in the hearts of all men and all nations. Afterwards may there come that glorious reign of the beatific vision, through which Thou shalt be all in all! May this reign not be long deferred! May the number of Thy saints soon be completed and Thy perfect reign begin!

Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven! Thy will: Thy counsels, Thy commandments, Thy good pleasure,—may this threefold will of Thine be done on earth as it is in Heaven. May all Thy creatures obey Thy commands, may all follow Thy most holy

inspirations, may all approve what Thy good pleasure has decreed.

Give us this day our daily bread! Bread, corporal and spiritual, nourishment for our bodies and for our souls. As our bodies are nourished by visible food, so our souls are nourished by Thy word, by Thy outward teachings and Thy inward lights, and especially by that divine bread which *cometh down from Heaven and is spirit and life* (John vi), and gives life to the world; I say, by the body and blood of Thy Son. Give us all these kinds of bread every day.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us! Behold, O my Father, I forgive all who have injured or wronged me in any way. I wish them no evil and I beg Thy blessing and Thy Holy Spirit for them. Therefore, do Thou also forgive the sins which I have committed against Thee. Remit my guilt and my punishment, the debt of guilt and punishment, which I owe Thee as a guilty debtor. Remit all my debts through Thine infinite goodness and mercy, through the blood and merits of Christ Thy Son Our Lord.

And lead us not into temptation! Be ever present to us with Thy aid and protection, so that no temptation may overcome us, and no allurements of the world or the flesh may draw us into sin.

But deliver us from evil! Deliver us from all the evils of guilt and punishment, from all the snares of

the devil, in fine, from all the evils of this life, and transfer us into Thy Kingdom where we may enjoy Thee, our supreme good, for eternity.

Amen. So be it done, O Lord, Father, King of Heaven and earth. So be it done; hear these my prayers and grant them according to Thy goodness and mercy.

This is a specimen of an excellent manner of prayer, which enlightens the mind and inflames the heart, and causes us to taste the sweetness lying hidden in each part of a sacred formula. Perhaps it is better to recite the Our Father in this way once, than to say it a hundred times hastily and with little attention. If a person has been commanded to say the Our Father three or four times, he can satisfy the obligation by repeating each petition that many times, and by dwelling on them with meditation, according to the method just explained. This is about the same as the method which Blessed Francis usually followed in reciting the Our Father, and it is that which Blessed Ignatius highly commends in the little book of the Spiritual Exercises, and I do not see what method of praying can be more excellent. It can be easily applied to other formulae of prayer and to the psalms, hymns, and versicles.

CHAPTER II

How to Awaken Faith

Every movement of the will follows an act of consideration by the intellect. The more attentively and profoundly the intellect considers the motives of virtue, or the reasons moving us to act according to the different virtues, the stronger the affection aroused in the will. Hence it is well to show what motives are to be considered in the several virtues, and in the first place how to awaken faith.

The first step is to place before our minds the truth about which we wish to stir up our faith.

Suppose, for example, that I wish to awaken faith in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the truth that in it are really, truly, and substantially present the body and blood of Our Lord, with His soul and divinity, and that thus the whole Christ lies hidden under the species of bread and wine.

We should consider the motives and reasons for holding this truth is to be believed.

The first reason is that Our Lord Himself, having taken bread, and given thanks and blessed the bread, expressly affirmed: *This is my body, which is given for you. And taking the chalice He likewise*

said: this is my blood which shall be shed for you (Matth. xxvi, 26; Mark xiv, 22; Luke xxii, 19; I Cor. xi, 24). So that this truth could not have been expressed more clearly; and there is no mystery of faith which is revealed more clearly in Holy Scripture. Hence if we are deceived, we are deceived by Our Lord Himself. But even to think so would be blasphemy.

The second reason is that this truth is held and taught and always has been held and taught, by the Church, which is the *pillar and ground of truth* (I Tim. iii, 15), the *Spouse of Christ, His mystic body,* and His *Kingdom,* is governed by the spirit of Christ (John iii, 29; Apoc. xviii and xxi; I Cor. xii; Matth. xvi, 18), and shall last forever, never to be overthrown by any machinations of hell or heresy. But if the Church errs even in one article, she can no longer be believed in anything.

The third reason is that in all the centuries from the beginning of the Church of Christ, this truth was handed down by the Fathers and believed by all Catholics. Our Lord's body and blood have always been treated and received as such in the whole Church, as can easily be shown from testimonies of the Fathers and Doctors who lived and wrote in the successive centuries.

The fourth reason is that this doctrine has been held in the Church by all who were eminent for sanctity and miracles, as is manifest to any one who

looks over the history of the Church in its different epochs. Indeed, the more holy and the more renowned for their miraculous power the Saints were, the more fervently were they devoted to the Blessed Sacrament. Thus Saints Dominic, Francis, Bernard, Celestine, Norbert, Xavier, Ignatius, Vincent Ferrer, Francis of Paula, and countless others. If these illustrious men erred on this point, then men most remarkable for sanctity and miracles were idolaters. If they were idolaters, how were they Saints? How is it that God made them illustrious for miracles and held them up as examples to be imitated by all?

Fifth, this doctrine has been confirmed by countless miracles wrought in order to confirm it. But it is impossible for miracles to be wrought in confirmation of a doctrine which is false and pernicious, because God cannot confirm what is false and impious.

Sixth, during the first ten centuries this doctrine was universally accepted in the Church and was not publicly opposed even by heretics. About the year 1050, Berengarius began to teach the contrary, but his teaching was immediately condemned by five councils and he himself abjured it three times, and finally died in the Catholic faith, professing great sorrow for his error.

Seventh, stress should be laid upon the character of the men who attacked this doctrine. They were

infamous, proud, impudent, impure, and victims of nefarious errors. Who can believe that God manifested His truth to such men, rather than to men who were most holy, humble, chaste, and modest? It would be folly to imagine this.

Eighth, the chief reason why heretics have attacked this mystery was that it seemed an impossibility. But we are obliged to believe many things which seem impossible to human reason. Let the adversaries of the Real Presence explain to us how God could make the world out of nothing; how there can be three persons in one essence; how the Son of God became man; how, if the Son is God and man, the Father and the Holy Ghost are not also men; how Christ was born of a virgin; how He arose from the dead before the tomb was opened; how the resurrection of our bodies will be accomplished; how the reprobates will be tormented in their bodies by eternal fire without being consumed, and how so many other similar things are not impossible, although they seem so to unaided reason.

Ninth, we should consider the weakness of our intellect, which is the lowest in the scale of created intellects. It is so feeble that it cannot clearly and distinctly comprehend any ordinary body or its nature according to its species. There does not exist in this world a scientist who has discovered the hundredth part of the secrets which lie hidden in one little ant. But if we are so dim-sighted with regard

to the lowliest objects, how much more must we confess our blindness and ignorance with regard to things which are higher, nay divine, and humbly submit our judgment to God and the Church!

From all these considerations it is clear that this doctrine is to be believed as given and confirmed to us by God, and indeed with the firmness with which it is proper to believe supreme and divine authority. Hence I will resolve to believe it most firmly, and rather to die than to doubt it in any way, and resist God's authority. Divine authority would merit infinite firmness of belief, but as this is an impossibility for us, God requires that we believe Him with all the firmness of which we are capable, aided by His supernatural grace, and that we should allow Him to lead captive all our senses and our intellect in the homage of faith.

In a similar manner we shall be able to stir up our faith in the rest of the articles, by considering the reasons and motives which render them worthy of belief and the greatness of the divine authority on account of which they must be believed.

CHAPTER III

How to Awaken Hope of Forgiveness of Sins and Life Everlasting

Let us consider, in the first place, that God created us out of nothing, according to His own image and likeness,—not to damn us, but to save us, and to make us sharers of His glory. It is the characteristic of goodness to communicate itself, and of supreme goodness to communicate itself supremely.

Second, after we had fallen into sin and perdition, God sent his own Son to assume our nature, to satisfy for us, to redeem us, and to make us, who were enemies, friends and sons of God, and heirs of His heavenly Kingdom. *"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that every one that believeth in Him may not perish but may have life everlasting"* (John, iii, 16).

Third, since God so loved us that he wished to undergo death for us when we were His enemies, how much more must He wish to save us now, when we desire to serve and please Him, since for this there is no longer need of His dying. For the Apostle says: *"If, when we were enemies, we were*

reconciled to Him by the death of His Son; much more being reconciled shall we be saved by His life" (Rom. v, 10).

Fourth, God wishes all men to be saved, as the Apostle expressly affirms (I Tim. ii, 4). It is certain that He gives to all men, and especially to the faithful, sufficient grace to obtain their salvation, if they are willing to coöperate with it (see the Council of Orange, Can. 25, and the Council of Trent, Session VI, chapter 13).

Fifth, the mercy of God and the merits of Christ are infinitely greater than the sins of the whole world. To the mercy of God and the merits of Christ, all the sins of men are like one drop of water to an immense fire. The mercy of God and the merits of Christ would take away all the sins of the world as easily as an immense fire dries up one drop of water, if men on their part would dispose themselves and be sorry for their sins. Hence, if your sins were as numerous and as grave as those which all the human race together has committed, and if you were heartily sorry for having offended the divine Majesty, and seriously resolved to avoid them for the future, they would all be blotted out in a moment through the merits of Christ and you would be made a son of God and an heir of the heavenly Kingdom.

Sixth, let us consider the great number and the heinous guilt of those sinners who have, as a matter

of fact, obtained pardon and salvation in all past ages. We shall then feel no doubt about our own power to obtain forgiveness.

Through these and similar considerations I will stir up in myself great hope of being saved.

CHAPTER IV

Means of Awakening Love for God

Let us consider God's love for us and the number and greatness of the benefits He has bestowed upon us.

In the first place He has made us out of nothing, according to His own image and likeness, thus enabling us to share His own happiness and all His blessings.

Second, He has made the heavens and the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the elements, and all corporeal nature, for us. He preserves, governs and moves them, and causes all things to be born and to grow for our benefit. Moreover, He has deputed great and blessed spirits to guard, guide, and assist us.

Third, when we were condemned to eternal death and to the everlasting flames of hell, He redeemed us, and when we were his enemies, He received us into His favor.

Fourth, He not only redeemed us, but also adopted us as His sons, gave us His Holy Spirit, and made us heirs of His heavenly Kingdom.

Fifth, He left us His body and blood to nourish us unto life everlasting.

Sixth, let us consider the wonderful ways, the great labors and torments, through which He merited those blessings for us after assuming our human nature, and how many indignities and hardships He suffered for our sake.

Seventh, in the sacraments He left us an infinite treasury of merits, through which we can be reinstated and reconciled as often as we fall, and He thus gave us His help to live rightly.

Eighth, I should consider the special benefits which He has conferred upon myself in particular. He ordained that I should be born not among Turks or heretics, or in the age when the light of the Gospel had not yet dawned; but in the age of grace, and among Christians, so that I could be trained in true religion and piety. He has kept me from countless sins and countless dangers of eternal damnation, in which others have been lost. He has preserved me from heresy and its seductions, with which the world is filled. Time and again He has allowed me to live after I have sinned and has received me back into His favor. Have we ever heard of a sovereign who was so clement that he received back into his favor seven times a subject who had relapsed into treason seven times? But God receives back into His favor as often as they have sinned,

those who have sinned seven times and even a hundred thousand times.

Lastly, all of God's cares, thoughts and exertions with regard to us and to all creatures, are directed to nothing else but our obtaining eternal salvation.

Therefore, since God, who is Supreme Majesty, has conferred on me benefits so numerous, great and wonderful, and has borne so many indignities and pains for my sake, and constantly acts with such benignity towards me, I will try to estimate the great love, the great homage and obedience I owe to Him in return. Indeed, if I were able, for His glory, to pour out my blood a thousand times, or to undergo the hardest labors for a thousand years, I could not pay back even one thousandth part of His benefits, because each one of His benefits is of infinite value and would demand from us infinite love and service. But since it is impossible to give this, I will firmly resolve to give Him that which I can easily give, and with which His divine goodness is contented, namely, the resolve to keep His commandments and to die rather than violate one of them. Moreover, I will firmly resolve to devote my whole life to His service, and to devote all my thoughts and intentions to His glory.

CHAPTER V

How to Awaken Contrition for Our Sins

According to the Council of Trent (Session XIV, chapter 4), contrition requires two things; namely, sorrow for our sins because by them we have offended the divine Majesty, and a serious purpose of amendment, in order to be pleasing to God. Hence we should consider the benefits which God has conferred upon us, and the ingratitude with which we have requited them.

These benefits may be considered in the manner just explained. But I should especially recall the admirable love with which He so loved me that He assumed my human nature, and in it wished to bear such great labors and pains, and suffer such bitternesses and indignities, and that in all these things His only purpose was to deliver me from my sins and from eternal death, and to make me a son of God and an heir of Heaven. When I have thoroughly weighed these things, I should consider, on the other hand, how little I have responded to such love and to such benefits. I have not thanked Him as I should have done. I have rarely given a

thought to His love for me or to His immeasurable benefits.

As to His love and friendship, and all His benefits, and all His promises, and all His labors, and His blood, and His passion, and His cross—I have despised them, and trampled upon them; and for the sake of things fleeting and vile, I have preferred to cleave to His enemy rather than to Himself, and to follow the counsels of His enemy rather than to obey His commands. And this is infinite ingratitude and folly.

Not only have I despised His love and His benefits, but I have offended His infinite Majesty most grievously in very many ways, and I have repaid Him with insults for the infinite blessings which He had conferred upon me.

Finally, there never was a man whose ingratitude to his own king and benefactor was as great as my ingratitude has been to my Creator and Redeemer.

With all these things placed before my eyes, and thoroughly pondered, I will be filled with shame, and I will stir up in myself the greatest sorrow for such ingratitude and such injustice to such Majesty and Goodness. Afterwards I will make a firm resolve to amend my life, confess my sins, do penance, and faithfully keep God's commandments, devoting all my thoughts, desires and exertions, and my whole life, to His service and glory.

CHAPTER VI

How to Awaken Sentiments of Humility

Consider the state of your body (Job xiv),—how vile, how frail, how earthy it is, to how many diseases and pains it is subject, of how many tiny parts it is composed, with what filthy things it is filled, like a sink. Finally, when the soul has departed, nothing is more foul, nothing is more horrible than a human corpse.

Consider the state of your soul. As soon as it is joined to your body, it is defiled with sin and becomes a slave of the devil. Its intellect is of itself blind as regards the things of salvation. In regard to natural things, it is so weak and so dim-sighted that it cannot know any of them perfectly, and although it would devote a thousand years to investigating them, it would not attain even the hundredth part of the truths that lie hidden in the smallest of these natural things. Your memory is narrow, untrustworthy, treacherous and confused. Your will is averse to heavenly things, inclined to things earthy, prone to bodily lust, and, in fine, has a propensity for every evil and is languid towards

every good. It is so frail that it lapses a thousand times at the presence of the smallest occasion of sin. Likewise, the weakness of these three faculties is such that the use of them can be impeded by a little fume or water on the brain, as we often see in the case of those who fall into insanity, frenzy, mania, or drunkenness.

Consider the number and heinousness of the sins of which you have been guilty, and how every single one of them made you an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, and an heir of hell, deserving of all kinds of torments and humiliations (Romans ii). Therefore, see yourself as, in the eyes of God and the holy Angels, deserving that no one should love you, that no one should honor you, that no one should help you, or treat you with kindness, but that all should despise you, spit upon you, drive you from their presence and load you with contempt; deserving that all creatures should rise up against you and avenge the wrongs done by you against their Creator. All these things are deserved by one who contaminates himself with sin, not to speak of eternal fire and ignominy. Consider that nothing can exist or can be conceived more vile, ignoble, contemptible, or more deserving of every kind of contempt, disgrace, reproach or torment, than a sinner.

Consider that from yourself you have nothing that is good, and that all the natural or supernatural good that is in you is from God, and belongs to Him,

and that the glory, praise, and honor for all the good that is in you, is owed not to yourself, but to God.

Consider what folly it is for you to feel proud of your bodily beauty, which is of such small value, and which fades like a flower; or to be proud of your bodily strength, which is far greater in the ox and horse; or to be proud of riches, which are quickly lost, and are a good of the lowest order, something outside of yourself, mere garish metal; or to be proud of nobility, which consists in the imagination of men, adds no perfection to the soul, has no value in the eyes of God and His Angels, is utterly destroyed by sin, and merits all kinds of ignominy; or to be proud of royal power, which adds nothing good to a man, but entails countless cares and troubles, and burdens, rather than adorns his soul, especially since it obliges a man to render an account to the Supreme Judge for the deeds and the countless affairs of his subjects; or to be proud of intelligence, which is so scanty in mortals, and is a thousand times greater in the demons; or to be proud of perfection in virtue, since we are so imperfect in all our virtuous deeds and so frail that we often give way to our own innate weakness or to the slightest temptations from without.

After thoroughly considering all these truths, resolve, in the first place, not to value yourself too highly in the future, and not to regard yourself as

deserving of great honors, but to recognize your own unworthiness.

Second, resolve not to desire to be known by men, or to be highly esteemed by them.

Third, if you are subjected to humiliations and ignominies, accept them as coming from the hand of God to chastize you for your sins, and consider yourself deserving of much greater ignominy and ill repute on account of your having so often deserved eternal punishment and affliction.

Fourth, elicit a desire to suffer insults, both because you deserve them for your sins, and because Our Lord suffered supreme indignities for your sake, and it is proper for you to bear His cross if you wish to wear His crown. For if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him (Romans viii, 17).

Fifth, I will always consider my own imperfections, but in my neighbor I will consider his perfections and what He is by the gift of God, and, in this way, I will prefer all others to myself, and look on myself as worse than all, and look on all others as better than myself. It was thus that St. Francis of Assisi ever regarded himself.

CHAPTER VII

How to Awaken the Virtue of Patience

I will consider the example of Our Lord, whom His Father wished to carry the cross and to die upon it, in order that He might be a model to us of patience and humility. Since He who was God's only Son, suffered such numerous and grievous pains, indignities, and ignominies, for the sake of your salvation, what ought you not to be willing to endure for the sake of your own salvation? Since it was proper for Christ to suffer and thus enter into His glory, should not we also suffer if we wish to enter into that same glory?

Consider the example of the saints. There is not one of them who did not suffer numerous and grievous ills. Many of them suffered imprisonment, exile, confiscation of their property, slavery; condemnation to hard labor in the mines, to hunger, to thirst, to nakedness, to sickness. Many were tortured by being tied with ropes, by being stretched on the rack, by being scourged with rods or whips, by being squeezed in iron clamps, by being burned between metal plates, or on gridirons, or in frying

pans, or over slow fires; by being crushed with stones, or mangled by wild beasts; or by having their limbs torn asunder, or by various other kinds of tortures, in comparison with any one of which all our sufferings are a trifle.

Consider also the labors and austerities of the holy monks and hermits, like Paul, Antony, Hilarion, Jerome, Simeon Stylites, Benedict, Dominic Loricato, Romuald, Bernard, William, Bruno, Dominic, Francis of Assisi, Francis of Paula, Francis Xavier, and countless others. They ever kept before their mind the words of St. Paul: "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv, 21).

Consider the following words of St. Paul: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." (Romans vii, 18). Even if we had to toil and to suffer all the tortures of the martyrs for a thousand years, for the sake of life everlasting, to that glory and to those eternal joys all this would be like offering one farthing, or labor during one quarter of an hour, in order to obtain dominion over the whole world. Indeed, it would be far less; because between temporary labor and the eternal reward, there is no proportion.

Consider the great advantages brought to us by adversities. First, they satisfy for our sins, or for the grievous punishments which are due for our sins,

and which otherwise would have to be expiated in the flames of purgatory. Small tribulations endured with patience for a few days oftentimes before God have a value equal to suffering the fire of Purgatory during many years.

Second, they purify the soul from sin,—from the stains of sin and from affection for sin. As gold is cleansed and made pure by fire, so also is the just man in the furnace of tribulation. For tribulations arouse the soul to flee to God and beg His help, and, in order to obtain it, become sorry for its sins on account of which many afflictions are sent to it; it purposes amendment, abandons its former trifles and is seriously converted to God. At length it gradually recognizes the vanity of this world and begins to aspire to the things of Heaven. Prosperity, on the contrary, causes us to forget God and heavenly things, and entangles us in many kinds of sins, according to the words of Deuteronomy, xxxii, 15: "The beloved grew fat and kicked. He grew fat and thick and gross. He forsook God, who made him, and departed from God his Savior."

Third, tribulation proves a man, because it shows what he is, and because it gives him an opportunity for perfect virtue. For if you persevere firmly in the service of God in the midst of afflictions, and accept all your trials patiently from His hand, this is a sign that you are endowed with solid virtue and that you are a perfect Christian. It is in this

sense that we are to take the words of St. James i, 4: "Patience hath a perfect work." But if you become impatient and curse your neighbor, murmur against God, abandon the ways of justice, give yourself up to pleasures and vices, and pass over to the camp of heretics and atheists, these are signs that your virtue was not very solid. It is in this sense that it is said in Proverbs, xvii, 3: "As silver is tried by fire and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts."

Fourth, tribulations make us like unto Christ, who during His mortal life endured every kind of affliction in the highest degree. And if we are like Christ in affliction, we shall be like Him also in glory. "Yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans viii, 17). "If you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (I Peter iv, 13). Although tribulation of itself is not lovable, yet it is made lovable because it conforms and likens us unto Christ, especially since it is accompanied by such great fruits.

Fifth, tribulation makes us happy in this life on account of the secure hope which it inspires of life everlasting. Hence it is that St. James says: "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation. For when he hath been proved, he

shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to those that love Him."

Consider the words of St. Paul, in II Cor. iv, 17: "That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." Note the antithesis. The tribulation is momentary, but the compensating glory is eternal. The tribulation is light, but the weight of the glory is immeasurable. The tribulation is on earth, but the glory is on high among the Angels. Who would not take a potion which is slightly bitter, but bestows eternal health and vigor?

Consider that all the afflictions which can come to you from the malice of men or from any other source, are a thousand times less than those which you deserve. One mortal sin alone deserves the torment of eternal fire; much more does it deserve all the afflictions of this life. You may think that you have never committed a mortal sin, although no one should easily persuade himself of this. But even so, you should know that your daily sins deserve all these afflictions, and many more besides. Hence, no matter what calamity befalls you, accept it with thanks from the hand of God, and consider that you have deserved much worse, and that you have been treated with benignity and clemency, so that with a light and brief affliction you may ransom yourself from those which are eternal.

Consider that tribulation is a sign of God's love for you. It is because God loves you that He wishes to cleanse and polish you here on earth and to fit you as a living stone for His heavenly city. "For whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth" (Proverbs iii, 12). "And He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews xii, 6). But as for His enemies, who are reserved for eternal fire, He allows them prosperity here below, for them to use and abuse.

Consider that if you are impatient, you lose all the fruit which you could have reaped from tribulation; that by impatience the ills which you suffer are made not less but greater, and that through patience they are not only mitigated but often become a source of consolation, so that our ills are scarcely felt or are even entirely obliterated.

After pondering these truths, resolve to accept from the hand of God all the ills which may befall you, and to consider that you deserve others a thousand times more numerous and grievous.

Second, resolve to bear those ills not only with patience, but also with joy, because through tribulation such great blessings shall come to you.

CHAPTER VIII

How to Awaken Love for Temperance

Consider what great blessings are brought by temperance, and what great evils follow intemperance.

Temperance makes our body healthy, vigorous, active, and free for all its movements, and wards off almost all maladies. Nearly all maladies that flesh is heir to come from intemperance.

Temperance lengthens life, as can be proved from the countless examples of those who have lived long in the strictest abstinence. It prevents those diseases which cause most men to die before their time, and causes life to be prolonged until it burns out like a candle after all vital heat and moisture have been exhausted. Hence Ecclesiasticus says (xxxvii, 34): "He that is temperate, shall prolong life."

Temperance gives vigor to our external senses, which over-indulgence in food and drink generally causes to become dull. It mitigates the passions, especially anger and melancholy, and above all, temptations of the flesh, and after the grace of God there is no more efficacious remedy against them. Hence all who were eminent for sanctity made good use of

this bulwark in the battle of life and came off victorious.

It makes the soul free and alert for all its functions; for prayer, meditation, study; for preaching, for giving counsel, and for efficiency in every kind of work. Finally, it makes the soul ready to receive light from God.

Intemperance entails the opposite of all these blessings. Consider what a shame, what a folly it is to sacrifice all these advantages to a trifling indulgence of gluttony and to expose yourself to such great evils, and resolve always to practice holy sobriety.

CHAPTER IX

How to Awaken Contempt for the World

Consider the teaching of St. John (I John ii, 15): "If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." Therefore, beware of loving the world because if you love it, the charity of the Father will leave you, and the concupiscence of the flesh, or the concupiscence of the eyes, or the pride of life, or all three together, will seize you and hold you.

Consider how small and momentary are the things which the world promises to its votaries, and how great and lasting are the things promised by God. The world promises riches, honors, and pleasures. Riches consist in gold and silver, in lands, flocks, houses, furniture, etc. All these things are earthy, they come from the earth and will return to the earth, and an abundance of them does not help to make your soul or body any better. Honors consist in offices, dignities, titles, dominions, magistracies, which do not affect the body and do not make the soul better. Pleasures are ticklings of the senses,

common to man and brute, and soon pass away.

Consider what evils and annoyances these things entail. With what labors, cares and troubles are riches acquired and kept after being acquired. The mind is ever troubled and strained, ever anxious and restless. To how many dangers of body and soul are the votaries of wealth constantly exposed! What countless sins are committed in gaining and in using it! There is no crime which men who are eager to become rich do not commit. There is none for which wealth, when gained, does not furnish the means and the temptation.

Weigh well the words of Our Lord (Luke vi, 24): "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation here." "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." In these words He points out the immense danger of damnation from riches. Likewise consider the teaching of the Apostle in I Timothy vi, 9: "They that will become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition." If these teachings are duly pondered, they are sufficient to arouse a contempt for riches.

With regard to *honors*, consider what cares they entail, and what anxieties, indignations and jealousies, have to be undergone to acquire or to retain them. The mind is never at rest. There are always

arising new occasions of fear, indignation, revenge, or of ambitioning and soliciting honors, so that there is no sea so unsteady, or agitated by such commotions as the soul of the man who is ambitious.

Consider, secondly, that great honors are linked with great burdens, and thus demand great and assiduous toil in order to fulfil their duties. No charge is more toilsome than that of kings and princes. Consider, thirdly, that the greater the honors, the greater the guilt incurred by sin, on account of the greater influence of a bad example, and because the injustices of kings injure a great number of subjects. Hence those words of Wisdom in vi, 7; "The mighty shall be mightily tormented." Consider, fourthly, that in the case of those who hold high offices, there is great freedom and impunity for sin, great power and facility for executing wicked desires, great dearth of monitors, great abundance of flatterers. Hence it often happens that they commit grievous sins which are rarely followed by amendment, unless their souls are filled with a great fear of God. Consider, fifthly, that the cares which accompany great offices and honors absorb all of a man's thoughts to such a degree that he can scarcely ever give serious attention to his own salvation and his future lot. Hence there are lost all, or the greater part, of those fruits for reaping which God gave us those three noble faculties: will, memory, and understanding. For anything that

does not conduce to life everlasting, no matter how great and magnificent it may appear, is of no account.

With regard to pleasures, consider how vile are the things which men enjoy and from which they derive pleasure. Such are eating, drinking, sightseeing, sexual indulgence, fine clothes, gambling, jokes, filthy talk, and the like. All these things are a shame for any man, especially for a Christian and a candidate for Heaven.

Consider, secondly, what disadvantages and injuries result from indulgence in pleasures. They enervate the body and subject it to numerous diseases. They brutalize the mind, extinguish the light of reason, make the whole man vile and contemptible, and drag him into countless sins. For there is no crime, no turpitude, which men will not embrace for the sake of pleasures. Indeed *there is no room for virtue in pleasure's realm.* Besides, with what regret and remorse are not the pleasures of the world mingled! In the very midst of pleasures, conscience often stings the soul, and when they are over, it smites the wretched soul with silent remorse.

Consider how much more excellent and pure are the pleasures of the servants of God. They are ever joyful and cheerful. There is nothing that crucifies their souls. Indeed even their sorrow for their sins and imperfections is full of heavenly consolation. From the consideration of the things of Heaven, and from their secure hope of future

beatitude, they derive a pleasure which is a hundred times greater than that of the worldling from his feasts and lusts.

Consider how great are the dangers to salvation from our companions and those with whom we have to associate; from banquets, drinking bouts, friendships, enmities, quarrels, wars, etc., in which countless multitudes perish and lose their immortal souls.

If you asked Our Lord whether you should leave the world, what counsel would He give you, what course would the Holy Spirit persuade you to take, what would the Apostles and others filled with the Spirit of God advise you to do? Think what you will be glad to have done when the time comes for you to die and to appear before the supreme tribunal in order to receive your eternal sentence. It is great folly not to embrace now what we shall then wish we had embraced.

CHAPTER X

How to Practice the Constant Presence of God

Consider that God is a Spirit most subtle, most powerful, most living, diffused through all things, penetrating all things, intimately present in all things.

Consider that this immense Spirit is intimately present also in your heart, and that He lies hidden there at the bottom of your soul with all His power, wisdom, sanctity, majesty, beatitude, and with the infinite riches and blessings which are bound up with His wisdom and power. In a moment He can make you perfectly happy by imparting to you one ray of His own glorious light. If you offend him He can suddenly damn you and deliver you to eternal flames.

His eyes are a thousand times brighter than the sun and they see all your thoughts, all your intentions, all your desires, all your deeds, interior and exterior, and all things are open to Him. Consider how He lives in all things, and particularly in yourself, by His essence, by His power, and by His knowledge.

By His essence; because His essence, on account of its immensity, is present everywhere, with all its perfections, forming the foundation and support of all things.

By His power, because He operates everywhere and in all things, creating, fashioning, preserving, sustaining, and governing all. If this operation of His ceased, all things would vanish into nothing.

By His knowledge, because He sees all things most clearly and penetrates all the thoughts, affections, and counsels of men and knows the secrets of their hearts.

Consider that your nature and all that you are and have, constantly depend upon Him, and are, so to say, constantly being created, and that you need to receive from Him at every moment all that you are and have. For it is not enough to have received all from Him once, as in the case of benefits conferred by men, but we must receive from Him continuously and He must give to us continuously. If He ceased giving even for a moment, His benefits would vanish. If the sun did not communicate its light to us constantly, but withdrew its action even for a moment, all the world would suddenly be in darkness; so also if God withdrew His beneficent influx even for a moment, all things would fall back into nothingness.

Since we are always in the sight of such majesty, consider with what great reverence and humility we

ought to behave in all things, and what care we ought to take lest interiorly in our heart or exteriorly in our works, we do any deed apt to offend Him. When we are in the sight of a great man, whose equal we are by nature, we behave reverently, and take care not to do anything that might displease him. Much more should we be careful in the sight of God's Majesty, in comparison with which we are as nothing.

Consider what impudence and audacity it is to dare to sin in the sight of God. A man who violates the command of a superior who is present and threatens death for disobedience, is held to despise him and to offer him a grievous insult, and hence is deserving of death. Much more he who dares to sin in the presence and sight of God's Majesty threatening eternal damnation, is considered as despising Him and all His threats, and to deserve eternal death.

Place yourself with special care in the sight of that Majesty every day, and lay aside all other thoughts, as if there were nothing else in the world besides yourself and God. Lay before Him your way of living, recount to Him all your miseries and the dangers to which you are exposed, and humbly beg His aid, protection, and guidance in all your ways and works, so that He may govern and direct you as He knows to be best for your salvation and for His own glory.

CHAPTER XI

How to Awaken a Longing for Our Heavenly Home

Consider the beauty of the place where the just shall live forever. It surpasses all palaces of this world as far as Heaven is more excellent than earth. The princes and the wealthy of this world highly value a dwelling which is splendid, magnificently decorated with gold and tapestries, and equipped with precious furniture. How highly, therefore, are to be valued those palaces to which the most gorgeous and richly adorned domiciles of the kings of this world are as rude huts or rather as stables for horses and mules! Imagine cities and houses of gold and gems. They are earthy and made of earth. Things celestial and supercelestial are incomparably more bright and beautiful. The elect, seeing that they will have the use of such an excellent home forever, are filled with unspeakable joy.

Consider the number of denizens in that blessed city, their beauty and nobility, their sweet friendship for one another. That multitude will be countless,

and, in a manner, will fill all that supercelestial region, to which the whole surface of our planet is like a tiny point. For the whole of Heaven is to be inhabited. In it there are to be no desert regions without inhabitants. Everywhere the praises of God will resound and alleluias will be echoed. The blessed will shine in their bodies like the sun, and in their souls like God Himself, since they are sons and true images of God. What delight from such a spectacle, in which there will be a countless multitude of heavenly citizens shining like gods, and most beautifully arrayed in their respective places and ranks! In dignity all are citizens of Heaven and sons of God, all are kings and conquerors, since they have all achieved the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. All are priests perpetually offering a sacrifice of praise to God. In dignity and glory the lowest in Heaven are higher than the kings of this world. But some are greater than others. As stars greatly differ in glory and excellence; so also the citizens of Heaven.

Each one will receive delight not only from the presence and sight, but also from the close friendship and companionship of all. Each one will know all the others by name and can associate and converse when and with whom he pleases. Each one feels the kindness and friendship of the others for himself. All love one another with a sincere mutual love, and all rejoice in the bliss of their fellows as much as in

their own. It is a great pleasure to possess the good will and favor of all in the court of an earthly prince. What a delight, then, will there not be in the fruition of the friendship and companionship of countless heavenly nobles in that immense court of the infinite Prince!

Consider the functions with which they are occupied. Their whole task is to contemplate, love, enjoy, to be delighted, to exalt, praise, bless, thank, and felicitate. From contemplating God, and from the consequent ardent love for God who has showered them with such blessings, and from the joy arising out of this knowledge and love, all break out in praise and thanks. They praise Him for all His works and benefits; for His works of creation and providence, for His works of redemption and justification, for His works of mercy and justice, for His rewards to the good and His punishments of the bad, for His judgments, secret and public, in fine, for all His dispositions with regard to His creatures. All these things are present to their mind, and they have a clear understanding of the designs of God, and are filled with boundless consolation; and in the greatness of their joy they forever praise, bless, glorify, and thank Him for each one of these things in particular. Thus matter for eternal praises will never be lacking.

These praises will be sung by the Angels with spirit-voices and in a kind of spirit-music, but by

the Saints also with a bodily voice. They consist of soul and body, and they will praise God not only with their soul, but also with their body. Thus there will be in Heaven a most excellent harmony, incomparably surpassing all the music of this world.

Consider what joy they will feel in seeing themselves delivered from evil and secure for all eternity. Below they will see the flames of hell and the countless multitude of the wicked burning like logs of wood. They will see the dangers to which those who are now damned, succumbed, and to which they themselves were exposed, but were rescued by the divine mercy. They will compare their own felicity with the misery of the lost, and thus they will doubly rejoice and give thanks to God. They will consider it an infinite blessing both to have been delivered from an infinite evil which had been most dangerously impending, and to have been loaded with the greatest affluence of eternal good things.

Consider also the joys which they will receive from the endowments of their glorious bodies. Their bodies will shine like the sun, and will be immortal, and inviolable, and free from pain. They will be agile, swift as lightning, and penetrating like a solar ray or a spiritual nature. To their swift flight all the vast space of the heavens will be like a hall or a room: in a moment of time they will be able to become present in any part of the universe.

Consider that, although these things are great and

the cause of great joy, yet it is incomparably greater to see God and gaze on His infinite goodness and beauty, the fountainhead of all goodness and beauty, and to embrace Him, love Him, taste His sweetness, and drink of the torrent of pleasure itself, to be a partaker of His glory and bliss, and to enjoy all His good things. He is infinitely more excellent than all created things and thus the joys which will be experienced from Him and in Him will be incomparably greater and sweeter than all the joys which can be extracted from created things. Finally, to all these joys there will be added the boundless source of joy from seeing clearly that we shall retain the unshaken and secure fruition of all these blessings for all eternity.

THE END

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